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AN ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

CONNECTICUT ALPHA

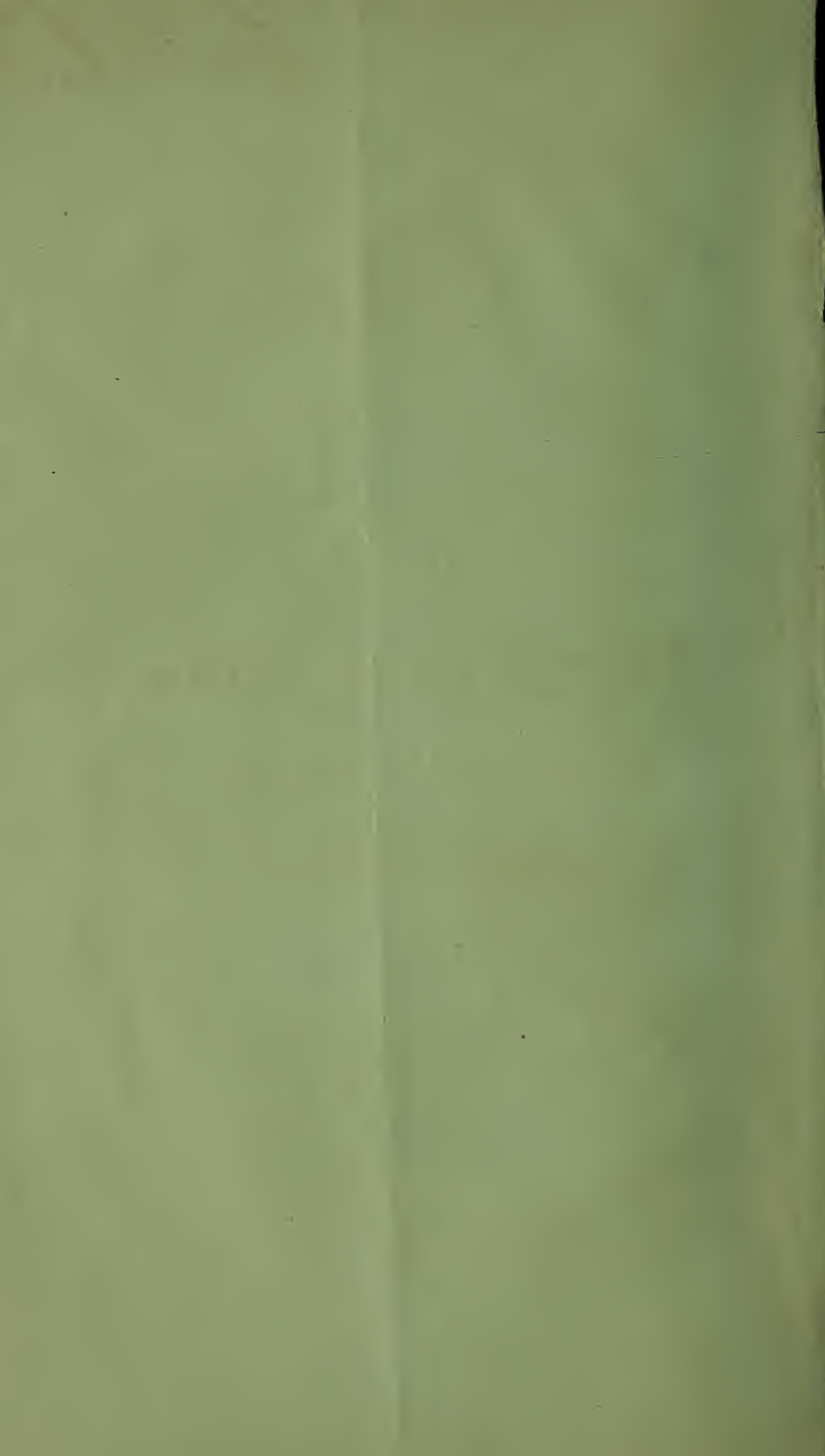
OF THE

PHI, BETA, KAPPA.

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BY SIMEON NORTH,  
PRESIDENT OF HAMILTON COLLEGE.

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ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE.

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AN ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

CONNECTICUT ALPHA

OF THE

PHI, BETA, KAPPA,

AT

NEW HAVEN, AUGUST 18TH, 1847.

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BY SIMEON NORTH,

PRESIDENT OF HAMILTON COLLEGE.

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UTICA:

ROBERTS, SHERMAN & COLSTON, PRINTERS.

1847.

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24-14961

NEW HAVEN, August 19th, 1847.

REV. SIMEON NORTH, LL.D.

DEAR SIR :

In behalf of the Connecticut Alpha of the Phi, Beta, Kappa, we have the honor to express to you the thanks of the Society, for your oration pronounced last evening, and to request a copy for publication.

Very respectfully,

LEONARD BACON, }  
JAMES MURDOCK, } COMMITTEE.  
JAMES HADLEY, }



## ORATION.

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History contains no record of deeper interest, than that, which unfolds the origin and progress of the Anglo-Saxon race. From beginnings the most obscure, and under circumstances, often the most adverse to improvement, its course has been steadily onward, to empire and to greatness. The triumphs, which have followed in its steps, and by which its progress has been so distinctly marked, have been as various as the fields of human enterprise are diversified. In the arts of war, and of peace, in the various departments of manufacturing skill, of agriculture, and commerce; as well as in science, and the pursuit of universal literature, men of the Anglo-Saxon race have ever shown themselves foremost and pre-eminent. The position which they now occupy, in the British islands, with their dependencies, and on this continent, is one of commanding influence; and yet their course is still onward. Their mission is not yet completed; and we think it can be deemed neither an empty boast, nor a visionary prophecy, to which we give utterance, in expressing our conviction, that when the drama of this world's progress shall have been closed, no race of men will be seen to have acted upon its theatre, a more conspicuous part, or to have left more indelible marks of power and influence on the pages of its history.

In the intellectual development, which has accompanied this progress of the Anglo-Saxon race ; and more especially, in that noble body of literature, which has hence sprung up, we are presented with a theme, alike interesting to every English and American scholar ; and we therefore deem it one not unsuited to the occasion, on which we are assembled. Our object will be attained by a brief consideration of a few topics pertaining to its *origin*, its *character*, and its *destiny*.

In the numerical increase, and physical improvement of the Anglo-Saxon race, there is much to excite surprise. We are told, that when the Roman power was verging to its decline, the fathers of this race existed, in a state of unmitigated barbarism, on the borders of the German Ocean. The land, which they occupied, was too sterile, and rock-bound, to afford them support, and they therefore gained for themselves the means of a precarious subsistence on the water. While other northern tribes were battling with the Roman legions, defending themselves against invasion, and in turn becoming invaders ; the Saxons, too insignificant to find a place in such conflicts, were launching their boats, and prosecuting schemes of plunder, and wild adventure, on the ocean. The native fierceness and indomitable energy of their minds, thus found ample scope. Going from island to island, and from one shore to another, as the chances of wind and tide directed, they respected no rights of property, which were not defended by the sword, and listened to no considerations of justice or humanity, which could stand in the way of the most unbridled lust of conquest and

plunder. In these facts, there may be little to gratify the pride of ancestry; and yet such was the origin and early history of the Anglo-Saxon race—the men who now occupy the British islands and the North American continent; holding the balance of power among the monarchies of Europe; swaying the sceptre of dominion in Southern Asia; and dictating terms of peace and of war at the gates of the Celestial Empire—the men whose enterprise explores every land, and whose commerce whitens every sea, and whose influence, in labors for the promotion of truth and religion, and in the progress of science and civilization, is more powerful, and more widely felt, than that of any other race of men now inhabiting the globe.

The successive stages of improvement, which fill up the wide interval between the Anglo-Saxons of the nineteenth century, and the fierce barbarians who lived by piracy in the Northern Ocean, it is not our purpose here to notice. They furnish materials, worthy of the profoundest study of the historian and the philosopher. It falls rather within our design, to dwell upon the well known fact, that in every stage of their progress, the Anglo-Saxons have evinced a true fondness for learning; a just appreciation of those advantages, which flow from its influence; and that, however distinguished in other respects, they have been no less distinguished for their progress in whatever pertains to the cultivation of literature and science. Other races of men not a few, have lived, and risen to greatness; have conquered, and ruled, and had their day upon the earth, and yet have reared no monuments of learning. They have

passed away, and have left behind them no records of the mind, by which to instruct and bless other generations. The valley of the Nile has been at once the birthplace, and the grave of empires. Successive dynasties of kings have there lived, and reigned; building cities, rearing temples, constructing pyramids; and they have left behind them marks of physical strength, and of proficiency in the arts, which are the wonder of the world; and which the world has never equalled: but who ever heard of an Egyptian literature? Successive races of men have swept over the plains of Asia, gathering in their train all that conquest and physical strength could collect; planting themselves, now on the Euphrates, and now on the Tigris, and yet again on the Bosphorus; but who has known aught of a genuine love and cultivation of letters, among the subjects of a Babylonish or Persian king; or of science, among the followers of a Turkish Sultan?

It has been widely different with the Anglo-Saxons. As with the Greeks of earlier times, so their first tendencies towards civilization and refinement, evinced themselves in the pursuit and encouragement of learning; and it was thus, even amid the rudeness of their infant and primeval state, that indications manifested themselves, of that deep sympathy with man, and universal nature, and of those clear, and large, and comprehensive views, which have since found expression in the riper productions of the Anglo-Saxon mind, and which have rendered the Anglo-Saxon literature one of the richest and noblest the world has ever seen. In their rudest state of barbarism, the Anglo-Saxons held in honor the bard and

the minstrel, and next to the glory of conquest, they coveted the glory of having their conquests celebrated in song. The fierce sea-kings of the Baltic and the German Ocean, were thus in their own way, the patrons of learning, and we hence find, even at that early period, amid the frosts and tempests of the north, the germs of English history and English poetry springing up, and giving promise of their future growth. We do not indeed suppose that upon their native soil, those germs could have ripened to that full and vigorous maturity, which they have since attained. On such a soil, the national mind lacked the nourishment requisite to its growth, and it was not until by conquest, it had planted itself on the British islands, it found those auspicious circumstances, without which it might never have reached the full and perfect development of its capacities.

Let us here then, as bearing directly upon the origin of Anglo-Saxon literature, briefly notice some of the circumstances, to which it was thus introduced; and which served alike, to call into exercise the national mind, and to give character to its productions.

We may mention first, the new and more congenial aspects of nature, with which it became conversant. Intellectual growth, manifesting itself in the various departments of literature and science, is not the mere product of original genius. Causes from without must co-operate with native and internal energies; and thus become to those energies, what the dew, and the rain, and the sunshine are to seed buried in the earth. The ground on which men tread, and the overhanging sky; the valley, the river,

and the waterfall; the hill-side, and the mountain-top—nature in all her aspects contribute to the growth and development of genius; and as they vary, they present that genius under new forms, and with varied characteristics. It is thus with the individual mind, and thus with the genius of nations. On entering upon the occupancy of the British islands, the Anglo-Saxons, accordingly, met with the elements of a new intellectual existence. They there found a climate comparatively mild. They found scenery, not only greatly diversified, but abounding in all the elements of beauty and sublimity. It was but natural, then, that the sterner features of the Anglo-Saxon character should be softened down, and that whatever tendencies towards intellectual and literary pursuits had already developed themselves in the national mind, should be strengthened and improved.

But, while in the British islands the Anglo-Saxons were introduced to new physical circumstances, they also there met with influences, which greatly modified and improved their language, and which rendered it a more suitable instrument for embodying and expressing the thoughts of a great and intellectual people. The languages spoken, and to some extent prevailing in Britain during the earlier times of its history, were as numerous as the nations which contended for its possession. Dialects of British, Latin and Saxon, of Danish and Norman origin, were there blended together in wild confusion; and that from such a chaos of discordant materials should have sprung a language like the English, as it now appears, in the higher productions of the poet and

orator, we can never cease to wonder. Nor is it easy elsewhere to find a parallel to such a phenomenon, unless it be in those gradual and silent processes of nature, by which the crystal, and the flower, and the unnumbered forms of beauty, which now overspread the face of the earth, have been made to emerge from that state of the world, in which it was absolutely without form and void. In this conflict with other dialects, the Saxon element lost, what the national character lost, its rudeness and barbarism. While it retained its own inherent power, it borrowed from others refinement, and copiousness, and flexibility. It became thus, adequate to all the purposes of literature; an instrument worthy of being employed in the highest and best efforts of the poet, the orator, and the philosopher.

But we deem it also worthy of notice, that in the British islands the Anglo-Saxon mind found a field, which afforded the most ample scope to its capacities for improvement and enterprise. Such a field had hitherto been entirely wanting; and without it, those capacities might have remained forever dormant and inactive. In the defence of their newly acquired country, the Anglo-Saxons found ample exercise for that warlike spirit, which had hitherto shown itself in expeditions of piracy and plunder. Its exhaustless stores of mineral wealth held out inducements to the exercise of manufacturing skill. In the cultivation of its soil, they had an abundant reward for the labors of the husbandman. In its rivers they were furnished with channels of communication with the ocean, capable of floating the superabundant products of the country, and inviting

them to embark in distant enterprises of commerce and navigation. In these circumstances existed the elements of national wealth and greatness; and in the Anglo-Saxon mind was not wanting the spirit, requisite to appropriate and improve them to the best advantage. Improvements in letters kept pace with improvements in other departments of effort. Accumulating wealth brought with it leisure, and leisure found for itself a befitting employment, in the cultivation of learning. Not only so, there was in the national mind an inherent love of knowledge—an irrepressible spirit of inquiry, which, if not independent of circumstances, yet evinced its strength, by making circumstances subservient to its purpose. Long before the Norman conquest, and while as yet, the island was overrun by successive hordes of Danish pirates, schools of learning sprang up. Even then, in retired places, men of the cloister were keeping their vigils, over the scanty remains of Grecian and Roman learning: and with what success and zeal they pursued their studies, we may infer, when we find among their number, such scholars as the learned Aldhelm, the venerable Bede, and Albinus, the friend and preceptor of Charlemagne; and especially, when we see the spirit of those times embodied in that noblest of Anglo-Saxon kings, Alfred the Great,—a monarch, whose glory it was, that he was at once distinguished among the best rulers and the most successful scholars of the age in which he lived.

Nor should it escape our notice, as a circumstance, bearing directly, and most powerfully upon the origin, and progress of English literature, that thus, at this

early period, the national mind was brought into intimate communion, with the spirit of Classical antiquity. The authors of Greece and Rome, became to the first cultivators of Anglo-Saxon letters, what they have been, to the scholars of every country of modern Europe, in which literature has flourished—at once the teachers, and the models of high, and successful effort. They have infused a classical taste, and spirit, into languages having little affinity with their own. From the shores of the Baltic, to the Mediterranean, there is not a nation, whose literature is not incorporated with the very elements of classical learning. Nor is this more true of the nations of continental Europe, than of England herself. “Her literature,” it has been well said, by an eminent scholar, and jurist of our own country,\*—“is emphatically, the production of her scholars: of men, who have cultivated letters in her universities, and colleges, and grammar-schools; of men who thought any life too short, chiefly because it left some relic of antiquity unmastered, and any other fame humble because it faded, in the presence of Grecian and Roman genius. He who now studies English literature, without the light of classical learning, consequently loses, half the charms, of its sentiments and style, of its force and feelings, of its delicate touches, its delightful allusions, and its illustrative associations. Who, that reads the poetry of Gray, does not feel that it is the refinement of classical taste, which gives such inexpressible vividness, and transparency to his diction? Who, that reads the concentrated

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\* Story's Oration before the Phi, Beta, Kappa at Cambridge.

sense of Dryden, or of Pope, does not recognize a disciple of the old school, whose genius was inflamed, by the heroic verse, the terse satire, and the playful wit of antiquity? Who, that meditates over the strains of Milton, does not feel that he drank deep at

“Siloa’s brook that flowed  
Fast by the oracle of God”—

that the fires of his magnificent mind were lighted by coals from ancient altars?”

Such, then, are some of the circumstances, which deserve our notice, in tracing the origin and early history, of the literature of the Anglo-Saxons. This was the morning of a day, whose meridian splendors, are still shining, and whose evening, we may not predict. Its history is familiar to every scholar, and we need not trace its progress. What dreams of fancy, and what creations of imagination, have diversified its changing hours! How has it been resplendent, with the coruscations of wit and of genius! With what triumphs in science and the arts, has it been filled up! What achievements in poetry and history, in eloquence and philosophy, have marked its progress! and what names of greatness, and of glory, are found upon its records! Versatility, as well as the power of high achievement, have ever characterized the efforts of the Anglo-Saxon mind; and it is not easy to say, in what departments of effort, it has most excelled. Other nations, ancient and modern, have cultivated the Drama; but if it be the true end of dramatic literature, to fathom the depths of the human heart, and to unfold the secret workings of its passions, in their most playful, as well as in their gravest,

and loftiest moods, then no dramatist deserves to be coupled, with the Anglo-Saxon Shakspeare. The Greeks and the Romans had their philosophers; and Plato, and Arestotle, and Seneca are no insignificant names on the records of the world; but if it be the province of philosophy, to unfold the truth, and by the truth, to make men both wiser and happier, they deserve not to be named, as compeers with Bacon, and Newton, and Davy. The praise of pre-eminent excellence, has been justly awarded to the orators of Greece and Rome; but when the world has grown older, and the Anglo-Saxons are to other generations, what the Greeks and Romans are to us, who will say that the names of English, and American orators, may not stand as high on the records of fame, as those of Cicero and Demosthenes? In those departments of literature, too, which are peculiarly of modern origin we know of no nation to whom men of the Anglo-Saxon race, should yield the palm. The world has been flooded with fiction; and yet, the world may be challenged for a brighter name in the school of romance, than that of the author of Waverly. All Europe abounds with journals, devoted to criticism, and scientific discussions; and yet where can be found criticism more profound, or discussions in philosophy and science, more varied, than in the periodical journals of Great Britain, and the United States. But time would fail us, should we continue to particularize.

There are certain prominent features of the Anglo-Saxon literature, which deserve special notice; and the consideration of which, will enable us to form a just appreciation of its character and destiny.

We may distinguish it, first, as the Literature of common sense ; and in this, perhaps, more than any other feature, we are to find its peculiar characteristic. Other nations exist, and especially one, claiming a common origin with the Anglo-Saxons, whose boast it is, that their modes of thinking, are pre-eminently refined, and spiritual ; and that theirs, hence, is the possession of a poetic literature, of more ethereal mould, and a philosophy, more transcendental in its inquiries. It is the prevailing habit of their minds—a habit, too, which has impressed its character, upon almost every department of German literature, to contemplate things under aspects ideal, and absolute ; while they evince little sympathy, with things concrete, and tangible—the living, moving, acting world existing about them, and of which, in spite of poetry, and philosophy, they themselves are real and component parts.

A singular contrast to all this, is found in the literature of the Anglo-Saxons. The mind, from which that literature has sprung, and with which, it is instinct in all its parts, is eminently practical, and common sense. It demands that there should be meaning, and uses in all things, with which it has to do. If in philosophy it is profound, and far-reaching, it is yet so far true to nature, that it abhors a vacuum. If in matters of taste, it loves refinement, it is yet, refinement without affectation. If it has need of spiritual elements for poetic creations, it seeks them on earth, as well as mid air ; and professes to find them too, not less in the by-paths of life, than in ancestral halls, and regal palaces. In its delineations, men are seen, not as mere ideal creations, com-

binations of qualities abstract, and absolute—specimens of humanity drawn from Utopian realms, or Plato's republic: but they are the veritable men, who walk our streets, and till our fields, and navigate our rivers—the men, who meet together in marts of commerce, in courts of justice, and in halls of legislation; mingling in high life, and low life; and diversifying thus without end, the exhibitions of that common nature, in which all are partakers. — man character, the plays of William Shakspeare, and Such are the men, reflected from those mirrors of human nature, the tales of Sir Walter Scott. This is human nature, as unfolded in the *Essay on the Human Understanding*; and as developed in the writings of that constellation of Scottish Philosophers, who have improved upon Locke; but who yet rest upon him as their common foundation. As in the *Epics of Homer*, and in the *Odes and Satires of Horace*; so in the *Essays of Addison*, the *Tales and Dramas of Goldsmith*, and the *Elements of Dugald Stewart*, there is something which speaks to the universal mind. While we dwell upon their pages, there is a responsive voice coming up from the depths of our own consciousness, testifying to their truth, and their fidelity to human nature. But how few hear such a voice echoed back from the reveries of *Faustus*; or the profundities of the *Critic of Pure Reason*; or the yet deeper profound of *Hegel's* abstractions and refinements! We deem it not enough, to tell us, in answer to all this, of peculiar associations, and mental habits modified by local and national causes. We cannot thus account for the signal failures, which have attended all attempts, to engraft German modes of thinking,

upon the Anglo-Saxon intellect. Systems of philosophy, which on German ground expand themselves into forms, seemingly full and regular, come to us in the writings of English transcendentalists, as mere exotics, dwarfed, it would seem, by being transplanted to an uncongenial soil: or rather as broken and disjointed fragments, as if shattered and wrecked, in the very process of changing their latitude. Wit and learning and industry have been united; and yet neither the genius of Coleridge, nor the strong, masculine sense of Carlyle, nor the polished elegance of Marsh, enlisted in this work of reforming philosophy, has been able to produce little more than a feeble undercurrent, in the deep channels of the Anglo-Saxon mind. For such a result, reasons may be given, suggested neither by national associations, nor geographical boundaries—reasons lying deep in the nature of things, and the constitution of the human mind; and among those reasons we deem it not the least important, that transcendentalism, in its contempt for common sense, and common modes of thinking, reverses the proper order of human inquiry, making the inward and the outward, the ideal and the sensible to change places; requiring us to begin, where nature intended we should end; and to end, where she intended we should begin; and it is hence, that Anglo-Saxon minds, trained in the school of Bacon, and of Locke, and imbued with almost instinctive notions of common sense, find in transcendental metaphysics, and we may add, in transcendental poetry and romance, so little in which they can heartily sympathize.

But we find another important feature of the Anglo-Saxon literature, in the fact, that beyond that of any other people, it embodies the spirit of enlightened freedom. \*It was the sentiment of a distinguished writer of antiquity, that despotisms are to minds, originally great and noble, what confinement, with the application of bands and ligatures, is to the

\* It is worthy of being recorded as an illustration of the topic under consideration, that Longinus deemed it necessary to put the sentiment here referred to, into the mouth of some unknown philosopher; for the reason, it is supposed, that if expressed in his own person, like the rest of his immortal Treatise on the Sublime, it might subject him to the displeasure of the Emperor Aurelian—in whose reign it was his fortune to live, and whose tyranny at length subjected him to a premature death. We give the entire passage in the Latin translation of Pearce.

Illud sanè reliquum non gravabimur, tuæ discendi cupiditatis gratiâ, addere, et explicare id, Terentiane charissime, quod nuper quaesivit quidam ex Philosophis, dicens, Miror ego, perinde ac multi alii, qui fiat ut in aetate nostrâ sint ingenia ad persuadendum maxime apta et in forensibus causis tractandis perita, acriæque et aspera, et præcipuè ad suavitates scriptorum facta; non vero jam sint (si rarum quiddam excipias) sublimia valdè et magnifica: tanta prorsus in hac parte scriptorum sterilitas sæculum circumdat. Num meherculè (dixit) credendum est trito illi dicto, Rempublicam esse bonam nutricem magnorum ingeniorum, quâcum solâ fere viri excellentes in scriptis et vigerint et mortui sint? Libertas enim (dicit aliquis) apta est et ad nutriendas cogitationes magnanimorum spemque illis faciendam, et simul ad urgendum eorum studium mutuæ contentionis æmulationisque de principatu eloquentiæ. Præterea quia proposita sunt in Rebuspublicis certaminis præmia, egregiæ animi dotes Rhetorum semper exercitæ acuiuntur et quasi terendo excutuntur, et cum rebus unâ (utî par est) liberae effulgent. Nos verò hodierni (dixit) videmur a pueritiâ imbuti esse justâ servitute; moribus ejus institutisque ex teneris jam cogitationibus tantum non quasi fasciis involuti, neque unquam degustantes fontem illum scriptorum, pulcherrimum et naturalem maximè (Libertatem, dixit, volo:) quare nihil evadimus, nisi adulatores magnifici: Addidit, alias propterea facultates etiam in famulos cadere, servum verò neminem fieri Rhetorem: statim enim prorumpit illud quod illiberale est, quodque quasi custodiâ eum tenet semper a consuetudine subactum: nam (secundum Homerum) “dimidium virtutis aufert dies servitutis.” Quemadmodum igitur (si quidem, inquit, verum est id, quod audio) arculae, in quibus Pygmaei, vocati nani, nutriuntur, non solum, impediunt incrementa eorum qui in illis includuntur, sed etiam contrahunt eos circumpositis corporibus vinculo; ita aliquis possit appellare omnem servitutem (licet sit justissima) arculam animi et puplicum carcerem.—*De Sublimitate*, § 44.

body—the means of converting men, into dwarfs, and pigmies. Such minds can be expected to find their full and perfect development, only on the soil of freedom; and if this be true of individual minds, may it not be true, of the collective mind of a great people? Tyrannical governments derive their being, and support from influences, which are utterly hostile to intellectual improvement. They are themselves the offspring of ignorance; and it is by planting sentinels, in the very avenues of light, and knowledge, that they perpetuate their own existence. The atmosphere, which they create, and diffuse, is heavy and depressing. Genius does not breathe freely, in such an atmosphere. It can derive from such an atmosphere no support, to sustain its upward movements. As well might we expect the joy, and cheerfulness of domestic life, in the cell of the convict, or from the galley-slave, as under such circumstances, look for a full development of the highest attributes of the human mind. A nation thus depressed, and weighed down, may have generals; but it cannot possess orators. It may rear pyramids; but it cannot produce poems.

If we are reminded of apparent exceptions to what has now been said, I answer that such exceptions are only in appearance. The elements of freedom are sometimes found in monarchies; as those of despotism, at times appear in democracies. It is of things, and influences, and not of names, that I now speak. The language, and literature of Rome, were the product, not of Roman despotism; but of Roman freedom. It was in the struggles of the tribuneship, and the consulate, that the national mind was roused, and developed. It was the impulse, which it receiv-

ed in the times of Brutus, and the Gracchi, which enabled it to hold on its way, in spite of the obstructions thrown in its path, by the Neroes, and Calligulas of a subsequent age. Where, and when too, was it, that Grecian letters most flourished? Was it under the iron rule of Lycurgus; or in the court of Macedon? It was rather, in that most turbulent of popular governments, the Athenian democracy. It was there, that philosophy pitched her tent, in the groves of the Academy, and in the walks of the Lyceum. There poetry strung the lyre, and found a responsive voice in the ode and the drama. There too, dwelt the historic muse, and the genius of eloquence. Times may change; but the names of Athenian greatness, are the inheritance of all times; and while those names are cherished and remembered, the world will not want evidence, that freedom is the true nurse of genius.

But what freedom did for the Greeks and Romans, it has done, in a still higher degree, for the Anglo-Saxons. Its influence has been more steadily felt, its claims more fully recognized, as their intellectual character has been developed, and productions multiplied, in the various departments, of their literature. That, which a Roman historian\* deemed a singular felicity of his own times,—that he might entertain what sentiments he pleased, and give utterance, to those which he entertained, has with rare exceptions, been the right of Anglo-Saxons, of every age, If this right has been kept from abuse, by salutary

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\* Tacitus 1. Lib. 1 Cap.

laws, on the one hand ; it has also been guarded from invasion, by positive institutions of freedom, on the other. Wherever Anglo-Saxon laws, and the Anglo-Saxon spirit prevail, the pulpit hence utters its voice, without obstruction. The press sends out its productions, with no censor to limit or control its issues. No orator withholds his opinion, lest his should be the fate of the Roman Tully. No philosopher falsifies the truth, because he fears the lot of Galileo, in the dungeons of the Inquisition. The right to think, and to speak ; the right to inquire, and to publish, has become thus the common inheritance of Anglo-Saxons. They use it, as freely as they use the ground on which they tread, or the atmosphere which they breathe : and its impress may be found, on every page of their literature. It speaks as loudly, in the prose of Milton, and the poetry of Cowper, as in the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence ; and it was the same inherent love of liberty, which dictated the one, and gave inspiration to the other.

But, there is another aspect, under which, this part of our subject may be contemplated. As an embodiment of great, and permanent principles, in literature, and science, and legislation, the productions of the Anglo-Saxon mind, are especially worthy of consideration. I do not here refer to those great principles of reason, which are common to all minds, and which can be deemed the peculiar, and exclusive possession of none,—those essential elements of our nature, which have been universally recognized, as inherent characteristics of humanity ; and without which, that humanity either does not exist, or exists in imperfect and mutilated forms.

There is another class of principles, widely different from these. They are the product, rather of national, than individual development. They are the slow growth, of time, and reflection, and experience. Years, and perhaps centuries intervene, between the vague conjectures, in which they first appear, and their ultimate reception, as principles of admitted truth. When, having struggled through long years of trial; contending with doubts, and cavils, and false theories, they are at length recognized, as undoubted accessions, to the stock of human knowledge, philosophers often contend for the glory of their discovery; and yet, philosophers are but heralds, in announcing them to the world. As the offspring of that great law of progress, by which generations are carried forward in civilization, and improvement, they belong to the age, or the nation, and not to the men. Nor is that age, or that nation to be deemed barren of great results, which has been instrumental in the development of one such principle; and which has made it, the common inheritance of the world.

Now, of such principles, a richer embodiment can be found in the writings of no race of men, than in those of the Anglo-Saxons. Nor is it of principles borrowed from other nations, and earlier times that I now speak. I refer to those, which are of Anglo-Saxon origin; and which too, in the writings of Anglo-Saxons, have found the medium of their first communication to the world. Time would fail us, should we attempt a complete enumeration of these principles. Among them, are those of freedom, and of representation, in the science of government, and of these, who can estimate the value and importance?

Among them, are the sublime truths, so distinctly announced, in the charter of American independence, asserting man's natural equality, with his fellow man, and his inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: and who can doubt, that as these truths, work their way among men, removing servitude, and oppression from the earth, they are destined to modify prevailing habits of thinking; and most deeply to fix their impress, upon the literature of our language? What too shall we say, of that principle of induction in philosophy, which perhaps, the Stag-yrte dimly saw; of which, faint and feeble glimpses were caught, amid the mists, and darkness of the middle ages; but which only found its full and perfect development, in the writings of that true interpreter of nature, Sir Francis Bacon? Let this principle be traced from the times of Bacon downwards: let it be seen, how it has proved the guiding star of men's thoughts, giving direction to their inquiries, in every department of investigation, and in every department, leading to results the most varied and magnificent; how it has created new sciences, and revolutionized those, which were once deemed perfect, and complete, and it will be seen, that it is a feature worthy of profound consideration, on which we dwell, when we describe Anglo-Saxon letters, as an embodiment of great and permanent principles.

But, let me notice one additional feature of the Anglo-Saxon literature—that, which is to be found in the moral, and religious elements, which it combines. I need not say, that nothing has greater influence, in giving to the literature of any country its character, than prevailing religious belief; and that the reason

of this, is to be found, in that constitution of things, which makes man naturally a religious being; and which causes the spontaneous outgoings of his mind, to be in some form, towards God, and immortality. It is not of creeds, and systems that I here speak; but it is the great, and general fact, that there is that in human nature, however fallen and perverted, which infallibly shapes for itself, a religious belief of some kind; and that in this, is to be found one of those elements of power, by which the literature of every nation, is in no small degree shaped, and controlled. If proof and illustration be desired of this, it may be found, in that noblest body of writings ever collected—the literature of the Hebrew Testament. It may be found, on almost every page, of every Greek, and Roman classic, inwrought with the very texture, and fiber of its thoughts and words; and as inseparable, as was the likeness of Phidias from that wonder of art, by which his own glory, was blended with that of the Goddess of Wisdom herself.

An influence like this, and one, manifesting itself in like results, may be traced in the progress, and development of the Anglo-Saxon mind. As this development has been going on, there has sprung up in our language, a body of theological literature, richer and better, it is believed, than can be found in any other language now spoken on the earth. Nor is it merely, in works professedly religious, that those influences which have been borrowed from christianity, are to be traced. The poet has felt them, as well as the religious teacher. The philosopher has been under their influence, as well as the divine. Thousands have felt them, who have not known the secret of

their power; and thousands too, who have cared as little for practical religion, as the vegetable cares for the sunlight, which gives vigor and beauty to its growth. The Anglo-Saxon literature, has thus come into existence, as a permanent embodiment of the thoughts, and feelings, and intellectual habits, of a great christian people. It is the exponent, and representative, of those influences of christianity; and especially of Protestant christianity, under which, Anglo-Saxons have lived, and acted, and fulfilled the part assigned them by Providence, in the great drama of human life. Nor is it an unworthy representative. Catholicism may speak in the literature of Southern Europe; but christianity, free, and expansive, and untrammelled, as it came from its author, will ever find a befitting utterance, in writers of the Anglo-Saxon race. I know that among that noble band of authors, not a few are found unworthy of their place and origin. I know that among them, are some, who have pandered to a false and vitiated taste; and others, who have tasked their powers, in poisoning the very fountains of truth and knowledge. But, I believe that such authors are destined to have little to do with Anglo-Saxon literature, as it goes down to posterity. Amid the heavings, and agitations of a mighty current, the ephemeral, and the vile will come up. But bubbles, be it remembered, soon burst; straws that float in eddies, rest upon the shore; while that which is too heavy to swim, like lead, goes to the bottom; and yet the current flows on, and still flows, becoming at length pure, and transparent in that emblem of perpetuity and greatness, the ocean itself.

But, let me also briefly, call attention, to another topic, connected with our general subject. What fate awaits the Anglo-Saxon literature ? Is it destined to pass away, with the men who have produced it, and who now read, and speak its language ; or will it survive when they shall have perished ? As a literature temporary, and local will it be forgotten, when the Anglo-Saxon nations have ceased to hold a place among existing empires ; or like that of Greece, and Rome, will it still live, the cherished inheritance of all times and all countries ? It is a region of conjecture, and of prophecy, which we here enter : and yet, can it be deemed a visionary expectation, which we cherish, in the belief, that a destiny of no common glory awaits the recorded monuments of the Anglo-Saxon mind ? The spirit, from which those monuments have sprung, and with which, they are instinct is abroad in the earth, overleaping its oceans, scaling its mountains, and exploring its secret recesses. With a rapidity unparalleled in the the annals of the world, progressive civilization is extending those monuments over the face of this continent. The language, in which they are embodied, is destined soon to be spoken from the Atlantic, to the Pacific, and from the Gulf, to the frozen regions of the north. On the wings of commerce, they are flying to the most distant islands, and gaining access to the most obscure and barbarous tribes. In Southern Asia and Western Africa, the triumphs of christian faith are succeeding to the conquests of war, and in those places of darkness, the Anglo-Saxon missionary is working his presses, and proclaiming his message. It can not be then, that we mistake the indications of the times in which we live,

when we say, that causes the most varied, and powerful, are giving to the Anglo-Saxon language, and literature, a diffusion wider than has yet been attained, or than is likely to be attained by any other language now spoken upon the earth.

But, it is a destiny of perpetuity, as well as diffusion, which we anticipate. The same causes, which have secured such a perpetuity to the productions of Grecian and Roman letters, will give an undying existence to the works of genius embodied in our language. We ask not here, with which lies the preponderance of true greatness; and whose claims to remembrance, on the ground of intrinsic merit, rest on the higher basis. We care not, whether Plato or Newton possessed the greater genius. We ask not, whether Aristotle or Bacon had the more discriminating and comprehensive intellect. The father of transcendental metaphysics, and the inventor of the syllogism among the ancients, have long since been handed over to immortality, secure in their places, among the great ones of the earth; and we can not therefore persuade ourselves, that the world will ever forget the philosopher of induction; or that other philosopher who discovered the law of gravitation. While the Platonic theory of innate ideas is remembered we do not believe the method of fluxions will be forgotten. For almost thirty centuries, the poet of the Iliad, and the Odyssey has been the delight of nations, as he was the delight of the Grecian villages, in which he sang for bread. And, as little do we believe, the world will willingly forget the poet of *Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regained*. The tragedies of *Æschylus*, and the comedies of *Aristophanes* are still studied,

and admired, as they were admired by the thousands who heard them in the theatre of Bacchus: and can we believe the time will ever come, when Shakspeare will not be remembered—Shakspeare, the very genius and impersonation of the modern drama, at once the *Æschylus*, and the *Arestophanes* of Anglo-Saxon men, and a name immeasurably greater than either?

But it is not simply, because names of greatness, and of glory are found among those, who have contributed to the literature of our language, that we cherish such hopes, of its perpetuity and diffusion. In that literature, are found elements, which in their very nature are imperishable, and which men will not cease to value, while the world shall last. As the literature of common sense, it is adapted to the nature of man, and will therefore find sympathizing hearts, whenever, and wherever men shall exist. We recognize in it, the literature of enlightened freedom; and we believe the progress of freedom, is destined to be still onward, unchecked, and untiring as the wings of time. Its development, and progress, have been signalized, by the development of great, and comprehensive principles, and we know that such principles can never die. We find in it moreover, the teachings of a pure and sublime religious belief, and we have faith in the assurance, that that belief is destined to overspread the earth, and outlast the heavens. It is no visionary anticipation then, which we entertain—no day-dream which we cherish, in our expectations of the perpetuity of Anglo-Saxon literature. It will survive the outward, and material forms of greatness, with which it is now associated, as certainly, as the immortal mind is destined to survive the mar-

ble, and the granite, which commemorate its achievements. London may become, what Babylon now is: as in Tyre and Sidon, fishermen may spread their nets, in the marts of English and American commerce; and yet the Anglo-Saxon spirit will live. The monuments, which have been reared in the productions of our language will still exist, fresh and undecayed.

To those who hear me; and especially to those, whom I am permitted to address, as members of the Society now convened, let me say, that as Anglo-Saxon, and as American scholars we may find in our subject considerations deeply involving our interest and our duty. It is our privilege to claim, and to vindicate for ourselves, a part in that noble inheritance of letters, which has come down to us, in the language which we speak. Our brethren of the Father land, may affect to despise such a claim: but we recognize no rights of primogeniture, in the empire of mind. We bid them remember, that their ancestors are our ancestors, their laws our laws, their authors our authors. The Anglo-Saxon blood is in our veins. The Anglo-Saxon tongue is upon our lips; and we will not therefore abandon our birthright, as men, and as scholars having the Anglo-Saxon spirit in our hearts.

But if this be our privilege, let us be mindful also of our duty. The treasures of the mind accumulated in our language, are indeed a most precious legacy to enjoy. But it is also a legacy, to be augmented, and improved, and herein is our mission, and our responsibility as American scholars. It is a mission from which we may not shrink. It is a responsibility

which we can not throw off. From the past, voices come up to us, commanding us to be faithful. Incentives from the future, beckon us onward, and point us to fields yet unoccupied, and to victories yet to be won. Let us not be unmindful of the position which we occupy. New facts in science, are here to be accumulated: new principles in philosophy, and legislation, and morals are here to be developed and applied. Means of power and achievement, hitherto untried, here offer themselves to the poet, the orator and the artist. It is under forms, and aspects, unknown in the land of our fathers, and on a scale, immeasurably more grand and magnificent, that nature may here be contemplated. May we not then cherish the hope, that on this continent, the Anglo-Saxon mind will find the elements, and the occasions, of a yet higher, and nobler development? May we not believe, that a new race of Spencers, and Miltons, of Bacons, and Newtons, may here arise to enlighten the world and reflect distinction upon our race?

“ Westward the course of empire takes its way,”

said the prophetic Berkley; and be it ours, as Anglo-Saxon and American scholars to hail its progress, and to augment its glory.





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